

Generation Good

A generation plans to change the world. Millennials — or 18- to 29-year-old Americans — are anxious to get jobs, but given a choice, they favor jobs they figure might make the world a better place. They grew up in the digital age, making them well aware of the world's problems.

Today's university students, especially, have a do-gooder mission, and fulfilling that mission is more important to them than having children or a prestigious career, acquiring wealth or becoming community leaders, according to Cliff Zukin, professor of political science at Rutgers University. Their sensibility is sure to affect how businesses operate because, by 2020, millennials will make up nearly half the workforce.

"My generation has been imbued with a sense of responsibility," said millennial Allison McGuire of the Companies for Good blog. "We grew up learning that our actions directly affect our communities." As workers, millennials hope to nudge their employers to take responsibility for employees, for society and for the world, she said.

But millennials are not idealistic fools. According to a 2012 survey conducted by Zukin for Net Impact, an advocacy group, the recession of the late 2000s made the millennial generation care about survival in the labor market more than anything else, including their change-the-world aspirations. Job security and a good work/life balance surpass their altruistic desires.

Still, Zukin argues, that is "quite unusual for those in their early 20s, who are supposed to be so self-confident and entrepreneurial." As the economy improves, he believes, the younger generation will re-focus on making a difference and seek jobs allowing them to do that.

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